

PRVHC Board Draft Policy on ADVOCACY

Preamble

In a competitive and constantly changing world, advocacy of key organizational positions is a vital part of effective organizational change. But advocacy comes with its own costs and risks and the benefits are often transitory. Accordingly, the decision to undertake advocacy and the approaches to be taken in advocating must be carefully considered. This document provides guidance in respect of advocacy by the Perley Rideau.

Discussion

What is advocacy? To advocate is to “publicly recommend or support”¹. Advocacy can also be defined as “the act of pleading or arguing in favour of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy; active support”². Advocacy then can be considered the process of convincing decision makers or stakeholders of a particular point of view that is supportive of the advocate’s position.

Why Advocate? The purpose of advocacy is to bring about change, usually changes to policies and laws, although it can also be directed at changing levels of awareness and understanding. In an ideal world, all of the issues that affect us as individuals and as a community would be easily resolved in line with our needs and expectations. Unfortunately, such outcomes are rare and, in a competitive world with many different individual and collective political views, the outcome of any issue is usually a result of the pressure and views of many groups. In this competitive environment, advocacy by governance bodies on issues vital to their organization can be considered an obligation. However, such responsibilities must be carefully balanced with the potential costs and risks of advocating. If the outcomes on any issues are important to the Perley Rideau, then advocacy on the issues must be a serious consideration.

Advocacy encompasses a range of activities, all focusing on a process of change. However, advocacy is a difficult and risky undertaking demanding a commitment of time and resources, with no guarantee of success. In addition, advocacy impacts the credibility of the advocate. For these and other reasons, advocacy is not something to be undertaken lightly. It demands careful consideration of the issue, the objective to be achieved, the risks to the organization, the stakeholders involved, potential allies and opponents and the organizations capacity to advocate.

Advocacy can focus at different levels from the local community to the national and even international level. Change at one level may be necessary to bring about change at another. In addition, change can occur at different stages in the decision making process, requiring the advocate to target those who make the decisions, what is decided, how it is decided or how it is enforced or implemented.

Advocacy Focus.

“To realize its vision, the Perley Rideau will pursue a strategy of leadership and be an advocate for change in health care, particularly in the long term care sector. It will strive to be a credible, nationally recognized leader in dementia care and a highly valued partner within health care and in particular long term care.”³

¹ The Oxford Concise Dictionary

² The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition copyright ©2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Updated in 2009. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company.

³ Whither the Perley Rideau: A Strategy for An Advanced Health Centre for Seniors, 4 November 2010

Advocacy must have an overall focus which is in line with the organizations mission and vision. This focus must also consider the limits of such advocacy. The Perley Rideau's mission and vision, highlights the care of its residents and clients and thus is the logical focus for its advocacy efforts. But these residents and clients come from a number of different groups, principally veterans and members of the local community and there is a danger of being drawn into advocating for these groups as an end unto itself. In this context, the organization must limit its advocacy for these groups to that which supports the core focus. This is illustrated at figure 1.

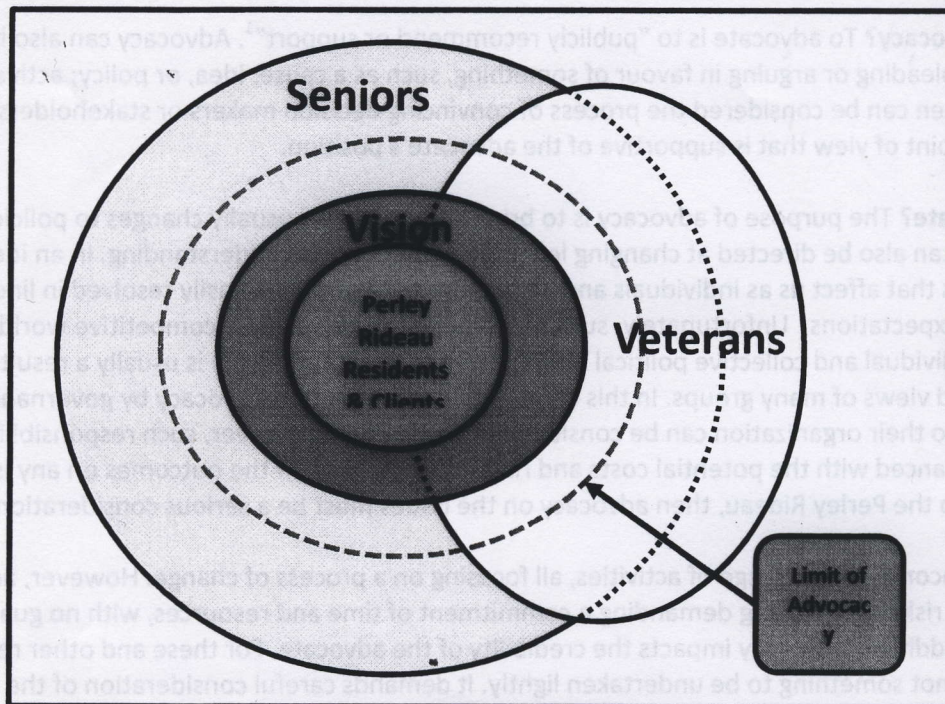


Figure 1: PRVHC Advocacy Focus

Power and Politics.

"the question of power and the changing power equations is an essential aspect of the process of advocacy. It is therefore a process that is intimately linked with the world of politics".⁴

Change involves a shift in power. For this reason, issues of power and politics are inextricably linked to advocacy work. Policy issues often have political ramifications and in some cases are a stumbling block to policy change. If organizations are to tackle root causes, they need to understand the political and economic context in which sectoral policies are drawn up and the power relationships which affect them.

Organizational Legitimacy. A key component of the decision to advocate is confirmation of the organizations legitimacy to advocate on the proposed issue. This demands serious consideration of the question; "for whom do we speak?" and to ensure that the organization has the explicit or implicit authority to advocate on behalf of the identified group.

⁴ Joseanthony, Joseph of NCAS/Christian Aid; 1999; from: Advocacy Sourcebook: A guide to advocacy for WSSCC co-ordinators working on the WASH campaign P. 27 & 28. Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), Geneva, Switzerland; WaterAid, London, UK; 2003

Partners. Organizations can rarely advocate on their own but must build alliances and partnerships with like minded stakeholders. Selecting these partners can be as important as identifying the objectives to be achieved. Selection should aim to achieve the best possible fit which optimizes the potential for success, while minimizing risk to the organization.

Policy

As a principle, advocacy will be undertaken by the Perley Rideau on a select basis.

In line with our mission and vision, advocacy shall focus on policy issues related to health care for seniors. Such advocacy shall be in keeping with our value of Resident-Focused Care, which highlights that everything we do is for the well-being of our residents and community clients. Any advocacy for specific communities (veterans, local community, etc) will be undertaken on a limited, case by case basis and only where such advocacy is supportive of our mission and vision.

Generally, the Perley Rideau will endeavour to partner with other stakeholders who share our interests. In this regard, a major partner will be the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors (OANHSS) which advocates for their members regarding important issues of concern to long-term care homes.

Implementation

Advocacy issues may be brought forward to the Board by the CEO or any Director or Committee. However, advocacy requires a long term focus and should normally be considered as part of the Perley Rideau's strategic planning effort. In this context, the Strategic Planning Committee will consider advocacy issues in its work and bring forward proposed advocacy objectives as part of its annual strategic assessment. Requests from individuals or organizations for the Perley Rideau's support in their advocacy campaign will be considered as any other advocacy issue.

Normally, advocacy proposals once endorsed in principle by the board, will be reviewed and developed by the Stakeholder Liaison Committee. This analysis should result in a specific advocacy proposal to the board and, upon approval for implementation, development of an action plan. In general, this planning, development and implementation of an advocacy plan involves many steps to include:

- Identifying the issues: what do we want to change?
- Analysing the issue; context, key actors, time frame, etc;
- Setting objectives;
- Identifying the targets: who do we want to influence?
- Identifying allies: who can we work with?
- Defining the message;
- Choosing advocacy approaches and activities;
- Selecting tools;
- Assessing what resources are needed;
- Planning for monitoring and evaluation;
- Drawing up an action plan.

Routine implementation and management of advocacy is the responsibility of the CEO. Indeed, as part of his terms of reference, the CEO should be advocating on behalf of the Perley Rideau on a regular basis. However, advocacy on major issues, in particular those requiring engagement at the political level,

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will often be beyond the capacity of the CEO and will demand board participation in the implementation of the advocacy action plan. Implementation of advocacy will be overseen by the Stakeholder Liaison Committee.

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